

**THIRD CULTURE KIDS:
EARLY TALENT POTENTIAL FOR GLOBAL WORK?**

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Yvonne McNulty, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer, HRM Programme
School of Human Development and Social Services
Singapore University of Social Sciences
461 Clementi Road
Singapore 599491

Email: yvonnemcnulty@suss.edu.sg

Telephone: +65.9107.6645

Third Culture Kids: Early Talent Potential for Global Work?

Jan Selmer, Aarhus University, Denmark

Yvonne McNulty, Singapore University of Social Sciences, Singapore

Jakob Lauring, Aarhus University, Denmark

ABSTRACT

Due to increased globalization, parents in professions as diverse as missionaries, diplomats, business managers and military personnel travel the world with their families including children and young adolescents. Their children are often described as different from mono-cultural children that have been born and raised in only one cultural location, because they have developed a cultural perspective combined from many national contexts. Still, as a research theme, the nature and characteristics of these children, who are frequently referred to as ‘third culture kids’ (TCKs), is relatively under-researched. There exist two competing literature on the topic. A general psychological-oriented literature has focused on the negative aspects of being a TCK and the resultant identity confusion and rootlessness arising from a mobile childhood. In contrast, a separate set of studies has explored the suitability of adult TCKs (ATCKs) as expatriates, suggesting that ATCKs may be an advantageous source of talent for international work experiences. In this chapter, we focus on the latter to, first, outline the characteristics of TCKs and, second, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of ATCKs in relation to their talent potential for global work in the business sector.

INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen rapid growth in the globalized economy. To remain successful in the international business arena, multinational corporations (MNCs) have realized the importance of global human resource management strategies, because having the right people has been recognized as the key to sustaining a global competitive edge (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Collings, 2014a). One popular strategy is that of expatriate employment to enable organizations to manage their labor force internationally (Doherty & Dickmann, 2013; Kraimer, Bolino, & Mead, 2016; McNulty & Brewster, 2017). Thus, an increasing number of foreign subsidiaries are staffed with expatriates. Vance, Sibeck, McNulty & Hogenauer (2011) suggest that over the past decade the demand for expatriates has increased given that,

“global competence among managers and professionals translates into increased cross-cultural sensitivity and relationship-building capability, more effective problem solving, and greater creativity. Other benefits include more effective self-management and adjustment to foreign surroundings, greater ability to build multinational teams, improved ability to deal with rapid change and uncertainty, and enhanced savvy in adjusting and responding to differing competitive and political environments” (2011: p. 31).

Not surprisingly, the acquisition and development of international talent has become important for MNCs (Farndale, Pai, Sparrow, & Scullion, 2014; Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010). Scullion and Collings (2006) noted that international companies face severe challenges in attracting, retaining, and developing the necessary managerial talent for their global operations (see also Collings, 2014b). But academic research on talent management is still in its infancy, depending mostly on disjointed primary research (e.g., De Vos & Dries, 2013; King, 2015; Furusawa & Brewster, 2014), while more comprehensive methodological approaches are needed (McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi & Schuler, 2017).

Generally, the management of talent can be said to be a strategic human resource plan to improve organizations’ abilities to reach their goals. This idea departs from the anticipation of required human capital for an organization and the planning to meet those needs. As such, talent management can be described as the systems and processes that enable a company to attract, develop, and retain highly qualified employees (Huang & Tansley, 2012; McKinsey, 2008). More precisely, Collings and Mellahi (2009) define talent management as “activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions that differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high-potential and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents, and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization” (p. 304). Hence, the main focus of talent management is to identify and support talented people in order to use their skills and competencies. However, cultivating social skills and integrating individuals in the organization to retain them could be equally important (Stahl et al., 2012). This is especially true

when dealing with global organizations (e.g., Hartman, Feisel, & Schober, 2010; Iles, Chuai, & Preece, 2010). With the internationalization of businesses a global dimension of talent management has emerged (Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014). Global talent management includes organizational procedures to attract, select, develop, and keep the best employees in the most important roles worldwide (Vaiman, Scullion, & Collings, 2012). The importance of global talent management to the performance of MNCs has become widely acknowledged in recent years (Bethke-Langenegger, Mahler, & Staffelbach, 2011; Makela, Bjorkman, & Ehrnrooth, 2010; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). This is backed up by research findings emphasizing the centrality of international employee mobility as a key element of international companies' global talent strategies (Collings, 2014a; McNulty & De Cieri, 2016).

While attempts to address global talent shortages has seen modest success (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013; Vaiman & Collings, 2013), an emerging body of research suggests that international and/or mobility experiences early in life can be helpful for developing global competencies that promote organizational effectiveness and individual career success in adulthood (Vance, 2005; Vance & Paik, 2006). Some of these early mobility experiences occur during undergraduate and graduate education coursework and include international internships, study abroad, cross-cultural virtual teamwork, short-term experiential learning within a specific global industry context (e.g., international cruise industry, travel agency operational design), and short travel study tours (McKenzie et al., 2010; Metcalf, 2010; Vance et al., 2011). These approaches provide not only the opportunity to learn about international business environments, but also allow the practical application of many domestic business concepts and skills in an intercultural context. Indeed, the expatriate training literature recommends various forms of intense experiential learning in order to be successful in the foreign working environment (Bird et al., 1999; Black et al., 1992).

A separate set of studies in line with the above has explored the suitability of adult TCKs (ATCKs) as expatriates, suggesting that their international experiences as children represents a distinct and unique form of intense intercultural experiential learning that can be leveraged in adulthood . ATCKs are individuals with at least six months international experience during adolescence (Melles & Schwartz, 2013; Selmer & Luring, 2014; Tarique & Weisbord, 2013;

Useem, Useem, & Donoghue, 1963). They are often individuals who accompanied their parents to live and work in another country when they were children (Greenholtz & Kim, 2009; Lyttle, Barker, & Cornwell, 2011). It has been speculated that international organizations could focus their global talent management initiatives on such individuals with early intercultural experiences as they may be more culturally sensitive than mono-cultural adults who, as children, have been born and raised in only one cultural location (Bonebright, 2010; Lam & Selmer, 2004a; Selmer & Lam, 2004). For this reason, Ward (1989: 57) has described ATCKs as “the prototype [citizens] of the future.” However, it is still a standing question whether MNCs are able to utilize this high potential resource.

In this regard, Becker, Beatty, and Huselid (2009) argue that many companies fall into the trap of spending too much time and money on low performers, while high performers do not receive the necessary resources, development opportunities, or rewards. We argue that in relation to global talent management, ATCKs may be worth paying special attention to. This could be in line with the argument of Becker et al. (2009) that there is a need for developing a differentiated workforce that is difficult for competitors to copy. Workforce differentiation as a strategy should be perceived as a diversified HR promoting those employees that are most important to key global business objectives. In order to achieve this, HR functions should differentiate employees according to their contribution to the execution of global strategy and develop differentiated human resource activities based on this classification. The most important individuals are those employees who address vital international business challenges and who are critical for achieving a competitive global advantage (Huselid, Beatty & Becker, 2005). In relation to global talent management, they should possess superior capabilities and competencies valued according to how they fit to the requirements of the specific international business strategy. In a global light, ATCKs could be those who truly create organizational value that can make or break a global strategy, that have the most valuable international skills, and that are generally the hardest to replace. Hence, ATCKs could be perceived as an investment to be managed differently compared to monocultural peers. First, ATCKs need to be identified, then developed and nurtured differently. They should receive the necessary resources, development opportunities, and rewards to be successful. In other words, they could have high potential but need special attention to be placed in critical positions so that they will stay with the organization and

eventually emerge as key expatriates or global leaders. The goal of the current chapter is first, to view ATCKs as high potential employees, and second, to provide an overview of important issues that represent key challenges when managing ATCKs as high potential employees.

The remainder of the chapter is divided into five sections. The first section describes central concepts in the understanding of ATCKs as talented workers in a global labor market. In the second section the advantages of using ATCKs as high potential employees is described while the disadvantages are outlined in the third section. The fourth section discusses important questions for future research to answer. Finally, the last section is a short conclusion of the chapter.

OVERVIEW: KEY CONCEPTS

The larger frame of reference here rests on the construct of cultural identity, referring to a person's subjective sense of belonging to a cultural group (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Cheng, Lee, Benet-Martínez, & Huynh, 2014; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007, 2010; Luring, 2008). Being exposed to a culture does not necessarily mean identifying with that culture. For example, according to Berry (1990), immigrants may have dual cultural experiences depending on the degree of identification with their home and host cultures: (1) marginalization (not identifying with either culture); (2) separation (identifying with the home culture only); (3) assimilation (identifying with the host culture only); and, (4) integration (identifying with both cultures). The latter type of identification in two cultures constitutes *biculturalism*. As opposed to monoculturals only identifying with one culture, biculturals have internalized and feel attached to two different cultures (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Hong et al., 2000). This can be seen as a subset of a larger group of *multiculturals* who have internalized and identify with more than one culture (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Fitzsimmons, Liao & Thomas, 2017; Lücke, Kostova, & Roth, 2014). The cultural identities of individuals may exist on a continuum called *identity plurality* that ranges from monocultural to multicultural. Together with *identity integration*, referring to what extent individuals integrate their cultural identities as opposed to keeping them separate, these two dimensions create a map of *identity patterns* (Fitzsimmons, 2013; Fitzsimmons, Liao & Thomas, 2017).

Identification with two cultures can create a third, hybrid or hyphenated culture (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; LaFramboise et al., 1993), being the discrepancy between the two cultures of the *place of departure* and the *place of settlement* (Benjamin & Dervin, 2015). The feeling of belonging to a third culture has been associated with growing up internationally as a ‘third culture kid’ (TCK; Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009; Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009; Useem, Donoghue, & Useem, 1963; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Pollock and Van Reken (2009, p. 13) define a TCK as:

[A] person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.

Thus, the ‘third culture’ does not represent an actual geographical space (i.e., a specific country or nationality) as much as it represents a sub-culture of belonging among those sharing the same experience of repetitive mobility involving geographical and social detachment, relocation, and resettlement (Benjamin & Dervin, 2015). In other words, the third culture is not a physical place but a virtual space in which no clear cut characteristics about permanency or national culture exist. Rather, the third culture is nation-less and fluid, with inhabitants who are in equal measure ‘cultural chameleons’ while also being ‘culturally homeless’ (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). In contrast, the second culture is a permanent physical place in the host country that provides a rooted cultural and sociological backdrop and framework for the grind of TCKs’ daily life.

Parents of TCKs have mostly been conceptualized as having a higher social and economic status as privileged expatriates, e.g., as diplomats, military personnel, missionaries, teachers, or other expatriates working in international business (Peterson and Plamondon, 2009). Despite the risk of conceptual dilution, a debate has ensued suggesting to extend the concept of TCKs to groups of children who are, for example, refugees or immigrants, international adoptees or the children of multicultural parents (Van Reken and Bethel, 2005; Tanu, 2015; Le Bigre, 2015). To do so would nonetheless cause a problem for the TCK construct (see Cottrell, 2011), given that the

defining characteristic of the TCK ‘insider’ sub-culture is the “experience of a cross-cultural lifestyle, high mobility (theirs or others’) and expected repatriation”; repatriation, of course, being what distinguishes TCKs from migrants and monocultural children (Tanu, 2015: 17). For this reason, children that sit on the fringe of the TCK construct have been conceptualized more broadly as *cross-cultural kids*¹ (CCKs; Van Reken & Bethel, 2005) and *global nomads* (Langford, 1998; McCaig, 2002; McLachlan, 2007) which encapsulates a wider group and is not dependent on geography alone. Included in the CCK cohort are children from international marriages (e.g., born to an ‘expatriate’ father and a ‘local’ mother) as well as middle- and upper-class local children attending international schools (as is the case, for example, in China; Tanu, 2015). Although much of the early literature has been about American TCKs (Useem & Useem, 1967), subsequent research has found similarities in other geographical locations such as British TCKs in Hong Kong (Lam & Selmer, 2004b), Central-Eastern European TCKs (Trabka, 2015), and TCKs in Germany (Meyer, 2015).

Adult TCKs (ATCKs) are those with one or more TCK experiences during their childhood who have attained the age of 18 (Bonebright, 2010; Selmer & Lam, 2004; Tarique & Weisbord, 2013). It includes growing up in families with origins in different countries, possibly holding more than one passport, and speaking several languages. ATCKs differ from third culture adults (TCAs) on the basis that the latter make their first cross-cultural move as adults, not as children (Bushong, 2013). International students are frequently conceptualized as TCAs. There is no general consensus on the minimum period of a stay in another country to qualify as a TCK (and consequently be considered an ATCK). Useem (2001) used a minimum period of one year while other studies suggest a minimum of two (Hoerstring & Jenkins, 2011) or three years (e.g. Lyttle et al., 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012). A minimum period of 6 months has also been applied (e.g. Melles & Schwartz, 2013; Selmer & Luring, 2014). Moreover, the age span defining adolescence has varied across studies (Melles & Schwartz, 2013; Moore & Barker, 2012; Selmer & Luring, 2014). Since TCKs gain their multicultural experiences in their formative years, i.e. when they are highly impressionable, they have been argued to be capable of adapting and changing their skills very quickly (Sheard, 2008). For this reason, TCKs may be able to develop

¹ Defined as a person who is living or has lived in – or meaningfully interacted with – two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during childhood (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009: 31).

their third-cultureness even after a short period of multicultural exposure, as it may be the individual experiences rather than the length of stay that constitutes the critical requirement for a child to acquire a third culture (Lam & Selmer, 2004b).

ATCKs AS HIGH POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES: ADVANTAGES

Adolescence has been argued to be the most important developmental period of life and thus a time of critical learning (Schwartz et al., 2005; Selmer & Lam, 2004). Hence, children who have been exposed to early intense experiential learning in international contexts may possess a heightened understanding and perception of how to handle people from different cultures. These early international experiences would make them open-minded, flexible in their mindset, and more tolerant towards people's differences in terms of behavior and thinking (Lyttle et al., 2011). Accordingly, researchers generally agree that ATCKs can be characterized as diplomatic, multicultural, multilinguistic, and functional in a variety of business and social settings. Spending their developmental years in a foreign culture triggers TCKs' identification with the 'third culture' (e.g., Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004) which differs from the single-cultural identities of mono-culturals (Selmer & Lam, 2004).

McNulty and Carter (2014) argue that ATCKs' life experiences come from being raised in a truly cross-cultural and a highly mobile world where the surroundings regularly change in chronic cycles of separation and loss. In experiencing a new culture, adolescents may be influenced in significant ways by their alien surroundings, triggering a life-long lasting effect that endows them as being able to fit in and feel 'at home' wherever they go. Notably, some scholars have found that patterns of identity vary among ATCK individuals, where some ATCKs may not even acknowledge a specific third culture identification (Hanek, 2017; Moore and Barker, 2012) despite that in theory it is shown to exist. Nonetheless, the early adoption of cross-cultural skills creates in TCKs a suitability for handling change, relating to other cultures, and communicating across differences (Bonebright, 2010; Lam & Selmer, 2004a; Selmer & Lam, 2004). Notwithstanding an ongoing debate that there are both positive and negative outcomes resulting from ATCKs' early intercultural experiences (Bonebright, 2010; Westropp, Cathro and

Everett, 2016)², in the context of international business, ATCKs represent a potentially valuable commodity in the talent management landscape.

Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity can be described as an individual's ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication (Søderberg, Krishna, & Bjørn, 2013). In the ATCK context, it could be argued that cultural sensitivity facilitates an understanding of host country nationals (Mol, Born, Willemsen, & Van Der Molen, 2005) and/or third country nationals more broadly, due to ATCKs being more open-minded towards out-group members (Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009), having less authoritarian attitudes (Peterson & Plamondon, 2009), and being less prejudiced (Melles & Schwartz, 2013). ATCKs, as a result of their intense childhood international experiences, may also show higher levels of creativity (Hanek, 2017). The potential for ATCKs to harness a high level of global work effectiveness rests largely in their cultural sensitivity being rooted in behaviors and skills that are acquired early in life (during childhood) and which become deeply rooted in the individual during their formative years (Tarique & Weisbord, 2013). Cultural sensitivity is thus a somewhat natural state of being for ATCKs, making them ideal global work candidates.

Propensity for Global Careers

In situations of choice and decision making, individuals holding a third cultural identity would be expected to choose options representing their global identity (Zhang & Khare, 2009), including career options. Due to their interest in international careers (Gerner & Perry, 2000), many ATCKs select college majors that helps them to develop an 'internationalism' career anchor (Lazarova et al., 2014), thus leading to work abroad as, for example, international policy diplomats, English as a second language teachers, and doctors and nurses (Cottrell, 2002). Indeed, based on their research findings, Tarique and Weisbord (2013) advise recruiters to contact foreign schools and universities to locate and identify ATCKs coming from diverse or

² Notably, the positive view has been generally represented in expatriate research (e.g., Selmer & Lam, 2004; Tarique & Weisbord, 2013) whereas the negative view has featured strongly in psychologically oriented literature (e.g., Peterson & Plamondon, 2009; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009).

multicultural families, who have lived in several countries, speak multiple languages, and have personality traits of openness to experience. Since not all of these personal characteristics can be easily generated by cross-cultural training prior to deployment on an international assignment, recruiting ATCKs already possessing such traits could be important, notwithstanding that although ATCKs participate in higher education to a very large extent, they tend to have unconventional educational paths. For obvious reasons of mobility, many do not receive a degree from the first college they attend, and studying at three or more colleges is common. Dropping out is common and many finish their degree only in their twenties (Bonebright, 2010). Nonetheless, research provides some empirical support for the contention that the multicultural abilities acquired at adolescence by the TCKs may be long-lasting, if not permanent (Selmer and Lauring, 2014). Consequently, there may be some good reasons to recruit ATCKs as expatriates.

As ATCKs tend to maintain global dimensions throughout their lives (e.g., relationships and networks; Cottrell & Useem, 1994), they are likely to engage in some forms of professional work that supports their cross-cultural identity. This does not suggest that ATCKs will automatically gravitate towards global work and/or global careers because of their high-mobility childhood. Rather, it implies that they may be open to, and more accepting of, the “potential of mobility” because their high mobility childhood has normalized the global career as one of many choices available to them (Trabka, 2015: 199). Moreover, a global career for ATCKs may not always involve geographical mobility (see Tharenou, 2005); international work in domestic jobs that require global work responsibilities could just as easily leverage an ATCK’s unique skillset as much as physically relocating abroad might do.

Adjustment to Global Work

Cross-cultural adjustment has for a long time been shown as a key characteristic relative to expatriates’ performance and success when working abroad (see Takeuchi, 2010).

Correspondingly, a lack of adjustment is frequently proposed to be a major cause of expatriate failure (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), including a lack of adjustment among accompanying family members (Black & Stephens, 1989; de Leon & McPartlin, 1995). Expatriate adjustment is defined as “the degree of fit or psychological comfort and familiarity that individuals feel with different aspects of foreign culture” (Takeuchi, 2010: 1041). Adjustment has been

conceptualized as pertaining to the psychological comfort related to differences in general adjustment (weather, food, and living conditions), work adjustment (work values, expectations, and standards), and interactional adjustment (communication styles, interpersonal communication; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Hechanova et al., 2003). Cockburn (2002) reported that ATKCs are more likely to adjust when living abroad as their high-mobility childhoods have taught them to be flexible and adaptive. Based on a quantitative study of TCKs in Hong Kong, Lam and Selmer (2004b) found them to possess distinct personal characteristics in terms of flexibility, international awareness, and experience. Such characteristics could be useful to increase ATKCs general, work and interaction adjustment, relative to non-ATCKs, in terms of the job requirements of global work and the ensuing responsibilities they will take on in international positions.³ Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009) argue that due to disruption of their identity development during adolescence, ATCKs become used to adjusting and readjusting to new environments (also see Nathanson & Marcenko, 1995) which can further assist their work adjustment in global environments. Indeed, in a sample of ATCKs from 13 countries, Tarique and Weisbord (2013) found empirical evidence supporting the proposal by Bonebright (2010), Lam and Selmer (2004a), and Selmer and Lam (2004) that ATCKs have a propensity to become successful expatriates.

Among the important personal characteristics that we suggest could be related to ATCKs adjustment to global work are the variety of early international experience, cultural novelty of early international experience, language diversity, family diversity, and openness to experience. Furthermore, among the positive aspects found in empirical studies, ATCKs have been shown to demonstrate higher social sensitivity than their monocultural counterparts (Lyttle, Barker, & Cornwell, 2011), and Sheard (2008) reported that TCKs in China express more tolerant views. Lam and Selmer (2004b) found similar results with regard to tolerance. However, they also found TCKs to be more open towards different language usages. Similarly, earlier findings by Gerner, Perry, Modelle and Archbold (1992) showed that internationally mobile adolescents rated themselves as more culturally accepting and as demonstrating more flexibility in interacting with different cultural groups compared to their monocultural peers. They also found

³ This is, of course, our educated assumption based on a broad overview of the literature, notwithstanding findings by Selmer and Luring (2014) showing that ATCKs (among self-initiated expatriate academics) in Hong Kong adjusted better than their mono-cultural peers but only in relation to general adjustment.

TCKs to possess greater linguistic abilities and to show greater interest in learning languages. In line with this, Moore and Barker (2012) found ATCKs to be better intercultural communicators. In part, this may be explained by Moore and Barker's (2012) findings of ATCKs being more likely to have multiple cross-cultural behaviors, interests, and values. Other research has found TCKs to relate well to individuals of different races, ethnicities, religions, and nationalities in various contexts (Eidse & Sichel, 2004; Useem & Downie, 1976). Additionally, it has been proposed that TCKs are apt to show a general concern for their surroundings and people not part of their own social circle (Lam & Selmer, 2004). Finally, Dewaele and Oudenhoven's (2009) found ATCKs to possess higher cultural empathy.

ATCKs AS HIGH POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES: DISADVANTAGES

Loss and Grief

TCKs' continuous mobility resulting in multiple cultural identities for them as ATCKs does not result only in benefits. Indeed, the advantages of 'third-cultureness' often comes at a cost. Some studies stress the negative effects of a cross-cultural upbringing (Nathanson & Marcenko, 1995; Weeks et al., 2010). A lifestyle of chronic change and mobility may result in feelings of being restless and culturally marginalized (Pollock & van Reken, 2009). This may be linked to what Greenholtz and Kim (2009) describe as the paradox of global nomadism, that cultural hybrids may seem at home in any cultural context, but could feel at home only among others with a similar third-culture background. Such individuals can find change to be an 'ironic constant', due to constant moves by their own family and others around them (Bushong, 2013; Hervey, 2009). Therefore, they seldom experience full ownership of any culture and, as ATCKs, may be prone to high levels of mobility across the various boundaries that constitute their lives: home, family, intimate relationships, and career. Because they have experienced cultural shocks early in life before they have had the opportunity to gain a sense of who they are and where they belong (see Schwartz, Cote, and Arnett, 2005), they may experience trouble in acquiring a sense of belonging and a sense of identity (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). Hence, it has been reported that the mobile lifestyle of a TCK may result in a clouded or confused sense of identity as they reach adulthood (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Hervey, 2009; Murphy, 2003), which often arises from a misunderstanding that the international part of their story is a "dynamic which has shaped them profoundly" as opposed to being simply a "matter of

geography” (Bushong, 2013: 56). This, in line with belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), may lead to unresolved grief issues (Gilbert, 2008) that, if not addressed, subsequently impacts on their life and career choices as ATCKs, as we discuss next.

Rootlessness

Another common side-effect reported in the TCK literature is that of rootlessness (Bushong, 1988; Wertsch, 1991). Fail et al. (2004) found that most TCKs either feel like they belong in multiple places, or that they belong nowhere. Dewaele and van Oudenhoven (2009) found statistical evidence for TCKs being significantly less emotionally stable than mono-cultural kids. Bushong (2013), in her counseling practice, finds that ATCKs are frequently delayed in their emotional development into adulthood compared to their monocultural peers, due to a lack of time during childhood to process the grief arising from a chronic state of constant mobility. Manifesting as repressed and unresolved feelings of grief, loss, rootlessness, and a confused sense of belonging, these issues typically begin to be addressed only at the point when they stop being mobile (i.e., ‘take a breath’). This is commonly at about the age of 30, when they are expected to have settled down and “are now in the emotional space where they can focus on their history” (p. 56). Westropp et al. (2016) found that although ATCKs were open minded, were internationally motivated, and had an enhanced cultural understanding, they were also ‘rootless chameleons’. Hoersting and Jenkins (2011) studied adults that had a geographically mobile childhood and described them as ‘culturally homeless’. Such ‘lostness’ in ATCKs arises from “changing cultural environments at critical stages in life, which interrupt traditional processes for learning cultural balance and belonging” (Bushong, 2013: 56). It has been found to lead to anxiety and depression (Bushong, 2013), and lower self-esteem (Hoersting and Jenkins, (2011). And, given that the result of cultural exposure may sometimes be negative, individuals who have lived in a foreign culture are sometimes less open to other cultural values (Cheng, Clerkin, Lee, & Dries, 2011), becoming more prejudiced as a result (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The paradox of global nomadism, then, is that while TCKs could seem at home in any cultural context, they may feel at home only among others with a similar cultural background (Greenholtz and Kim, 2009). The search for others is a likely reason why various ATCK networking and social support organizations have been created (e.g., www.denizenmag.com;

www.figt.org, www.tckid.com) as a means to cater to this unique type of commonality (Bonebright, 2010).

The downside of childhood mobility is that not all ATCKs respond to their early international experiences in the same way; whereas some embrace their cross-cultural experiences and learn to leverage its benefits, others see their internationally mobile upbringing as having trapped them in a life over which they had no control, i.e., they view their childhood as an unfortunate circumstance forced upon them as a result of their parents' career choice (Tanu, 2015). Early rootlessness during childhood often results in one of two outcomes for ATCKs as they enter adulthood: (1) an unspoken permission to continue to participate in many cultures as an almost automatic extension, and embracing, of their high mobility childhood (where the real challenge is to stay in one place); or conversely, (2) a deliberate rejection of a high-mobility lifestyle in favour of remaining in one geographical location for the rest of their lives. Some ATCKs who come to loathe the impermanent nature of their childhood may opt for a rooted and permanent adult life (to 'settle down') in which career and family mobility is deliberately avoided for a stable relationship and the well-being of their partner and children. These ATCKs voluntarily remove themselves from the opportunities presented by global work. Indeed, Trabka (2015) found in her comparative study of Polish and American TCKs that mobility is not a priority in ATCKs' professional life, where being independent and adopting a freelancing career model were more important objectives and mobility would be undertaken only when the right opportunities arose. Our point is that, despite the rare skillset of social and cultural capital they acquire at a young age, not all ATCKs are willing to leverage these skills by engaging in global work (Bushong, 2013), with consequent implications for the sourcing of global talent.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Since the academic research on ATCKs is relatively undeveloped, there are a number of new avenues that we propose could be taken. As our focus is on business expatriation, ATCKs may be suitable as expatriates (Selmer and Lam, 2004; Lam and Selmer, 2004a) and part of a global talent management effort (Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014). This includes both corporate and

non-corporate assigned expatriates (AEs)⁴ as well as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs),⁵ with the latter likely to constitute a higher proportion of ATCKs given their preference for independence and a free-agent career model (Trabka, 2015). In the case of self-initiated mobility, the preference for expatriation may become even more pronounced since the ATCK will be required to obtain their global work opportunity without home country organizational support - something they are undoubtedly used to arising from an early life of necessary adaptability. However, there are a number of issues that may impact on the suitability of ATCKs as an important element of a global talent management strategy. One such issue is the effect of rootlessness and identity confusion felt by many. Potential downsides of the ATCK global worker needs further exploration in relation to how valuable ATCKs are as global talent and for which types of assignments they should be engaged. For example, if ATCKs are rootless nomads, they may not necessarily be relied on to stay in the organization for a long time. Thus, short-term assignments or work involving frequent international business travel may be preferable to expensive long-term strategic assignments where expatriate attrition can impact on organizational performance. Research questions include:

- RQ1: Are ATCKs more, or less, likely to engage in assigned versus self-initiated expatriation?
- RQ2: Which forms of global talent management are better suited to ATCKs in relation to (a) leveraging their social and cultural capital; (2) their attrition; and, (3) obtaining a satisfactory expatriate ROI?

Further research is needed to explore whether ATCK expatriates may have an advantage over TCAs (their mono-cultural counterparts) in terms of interaction and work adjustment. Although Selmer and Luring (2014) did not find any such advantage for ATCK self-initiated expatriate academics in Hong Kong, it may still exist under other circumstances. It would be important to vary the location and type of expatriates to test if their early findings are robust in different situations. Similarly, since the inter-group differences in their study were somewhat weak, it would be necessary to test for various mediators and moderators. For example, gender, age and

⁴ Defined as “people whose careers often unfold within one organization which seek to help them improve their career advancement within the company through multiple long-term assignments” (McNulty & Brewster, 2017: 32).

⁵ SIEs are “individuals who initiate and usually finance their own expatriation and are not transferred by organizations. They relocate to a country of their choice to pursue cultural, personal, and career development experiences, often with no definite time frame in mind” (Shaffer et al., 2012, p. 1286).

level of education may have an influence on the advantage of ATCK expatriates over TCAs (mono-culturalists). Recently, Fitzsimmons, Liao & Thomas (2017) also found that individuals who integrated their cultural identities experienced higher levels of personal well-being than those who kept them separate. It would be relevant and interesting to test if that also holds for ATCKs in terms of their general adjustment, for whom they have created their third, hybrid or hyphenated cultural identity by a process of integration (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; LaFramboise et al., 1993). Research questions include:

- RQ3: In the context of (a) self-initiated expatriation and (b) assigned expatriation, are ATCKs likely to (i) adjust and (ii) perform better than TCAs (monoculturalists)?
- RQ4: To what extent is (a) expatriate interaction adjustment and (b) expatriate work adjustment impacted by ATCKs' (i) age, (ii) gender, and (iii) level of education?
- RQ5: To what degree does cultural identity integration for ATCKs impact on their general adjustment?

A further line of research concerns theoretically developing the TCK construct in relation to its boundary conditions as well as theoretical foundation. An ongoing debate has centred around the continued relevance of the TCK term to adequately describe the people it intends. Trabka (2015: 187) suggests that, aside from Americans and those in South-East Asia, the term is “approached rather suspiciously by researchers all over the world.” A key issue is to identify what is meant by ‘culture’ in the TCK label wherein people who identify with a particular culture often do not do so homogeneously but instead choose “components of the cultural tool kit to construct their actions and identities” (p. 188). Thus, the TCK identity is not necessarily a shared cultural identity as much as it is an amalgam of *shared experiences* representing a “transnational youth” (Tanu, 2015: 14). In the context of expatriation for ATCKs, further research is needed to determine which sets of shared experiences are more likely to result in ATCKs attraction to global work and which characteristics of their shared experiences can enhance expatriate performance. Similarly, the distinction between TCKs, CCKs and TCAs is an important one (see Bushong, 2013), because the point at which the individual experiences mobility for the first time (childhood versus adulthood) is likely to impact on their propensity to engage in expatriate job changes as well as the types of global work experiences they are likely to pursue. An

understanding of ATCKs motives for global work can therefore benefit in the talent management process.

Takeuchi (2010: 1044) suggests that expatriate adjustment can be better studied through the lens of person-situation interaction (see Pervin, 1989) because it “explains individual behaviors by emphasizing the continuous and multitudinous interactions between person characteristics and situational characteristics”. For ATCKs, this is a particularly appropriate context in which to examine how a personal life history of early chronic mobility interacts with the host-country environment in which they are undertaking global work to impact on their adjustment, performance, propensity to undertake further mobility (willingness to go), and tendency to engage in job changes (retention). Bushong (2013) argues that it is not the geography of the ATCK experience but the dynamic and complex interplay of international experiences that explains individuals’ behaviour. In the context of expatriation, then, interactions between an ATCK’s person and situational characteristics is likely to be a better explanation for their expatriation choices than simply relying on their prior international exposure. Research questions include:

- RQ6: Does the term ‘TCK’ adequately describe the people it intends?
- RQ7: Which sets of shared experiences are more or less likely to result in ATCKs attraction to global work?
- RQ8: Which characteristics of ATCKs’ shared experiences enhances expatriate performance?
- RQ9: Do differences among TCK sub-types (e.g., CCAs, TCAs) explain outcomes related to expatriates’ (a) propensity to engage in expatriate job changes, and (b) the types of global work experiences they pursue?

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have defined the main concepts associated with TCKs life experience, ranging from the constructs of cultural identity and biculturalism, to the specific concept of TCKs and ATCKs. Indicating their cultural sensitivity, we have discussed ATCKs as high potential global talent. While pointing out their advantages, there are also disadvantages arising from the TCK experience, making the suitability of ATCKs as a talent potential for global work questionable. A future research agenda has been outlined to further explore this under-researched field of

investigation. That said and done, we must admit that the main proposition - whether ATCKs have a talent potential for global work – remains in large part unanswered. Although our review appears promising in that ATCKs seem to be good candidates for expatriation, much more empirical and theoretical work is needed before we can respond to this proposition with confidence.

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